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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“THE GATE, THE ROAD”**  
**Matthew 7:13-14**

☠ **“There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death”** (Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25).

It is true. Actually, there are countless dead-end ways that *appear* **“to be right.”**

My road to perdition was a certain strain of religiosity. I sincerely believed that by praying the Sinner’s Prayer *and* confessing correct biblical doctrine *and* excelling at church life *and* avoiding the sins of the flesh, I could secure life abundant and eternal.

By no means are any of those things bad. In and of themselves, they are good.

Neither are they irrelevant to discipleship. They can be a vital part of life in Christ.

Yet, when performed in one’s own strength with the goal of meriting salvation or repaying God for a spot in heaven, they are a shortcut to ruin. My “Churchianity” earned me plenty of pats on the back – even as it put more distance between me and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

My course was paved with Bible reading and church attendance and good deeds. It looked **“right.”** But make no mistake: it was a Highway to Hell.

That is why I am eternally grateful to Sovereign God for permitting a series of painful events, in combination with my body chemistry, to plunge me into deep depression. It

was the greatest possible act of divine mercy and kindness to me.

The Lord could have kept me from falling into that black hole. He could have spared me my struggle with suicidal impulses.

Had he done so, I would not have cried out for rescue. Without a crisis of that magnitude to stop me dead in my tracks, I would have kept marching straight toward destruction.

? Many people in our culture take it for granted that all roads lead to Heaven. What about us?

? Many religious people (possibly most) do not make *that* assumption, but they never question that their road leads to Paradise. What about us?

{1 Co 15:26} **“There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.”** Until Christ returns, every human being will suffer physical death; it is **“the last enemy to be destroyed.”**

📖 But this is about total death: death of the body without hope of resurrection, death of the soul, death of the spirit. Is Hell a place of conscious torment or oblivious annihilation? That is open to debate. Regardless, death is a condition of absolute lifelessness apart from the Living God.

**“There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.”** Truth be told, there is only one way that does *not* lead to death in the end.

▣ Please turn to Matthew 7:13-14. Jesus urges: **“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small**

**is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”**

📖 He is not talking about bare existence. This is about abundant, eternal life – that is, total life: life of the physical body through resurrection when Christ returns, and life of the spirit and the soul which begins now, but which will reach full fruition in eternity with God.

- **“Enter through the narrow gate... that leads to life.”** There is no need to speculate about the identity of the gate. In John 10:7, 9 Messiah proclaims, **“Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.... I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.”**

- Later, in John 14:6, he declares **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

**“I am the gate.” “I am the way.”** This is the offense of the Gospel. This is the obstruction over which we are inclined to trip.

{1 Co 1:22-24} Paul explains that **“Jews demand [demonstrations of miraculous power] and Greeks look for [philosophical logic], “but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”**

The sticking point for most skeptics probably is not the cross *per se*; it is the claim that Jesus is the one and only point of entry into life.

- ★ Notice that the Savior speaks in terms that are personal and relational: **“Enter *through* the narrow**

**gate,” “whoever enters *through* me will be saved,” “No one comes to the Father except *through* me.”**

{Jas 2:19} He does not say, ‘Enter by correct beliefs *about* the gate.’ In the Book of James we learn that **“Even the demons believe”** the truth about God – and they *are* going to Hell.

{Mt 7:21} He does not say, ‘Enter by verbal confession *of* faith in the gate.’ Christ Jesus has warned, **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven...”**

{Mt 7:22-23} Nor does he say, ‘Enter by deeds done *for* the gate.’ The Lord has taught that there are many who prophesy, exorcise demons, and perform miracles in his name, but to whom he will announce: **“I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”**

He does say, **“Enter through the narrow gate.” “Enter through [me].” “Life”** is found, not in correct beliefs *about* the gate but *in the gate himself*. **“Life”** is found, not in verbal confession *regarding* the gate, but *in the gate himself*. **“Life”** is found, not in one’s deeds done *for* the gate, but *in the gate himself*.

? Are you in life-giving relationship with God the Son? Have you found the gate of life and entered through it?

Remember: **“There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.”** If you are on that road and want to get off, come speak with me. I will not judge you. I will help you explore Christ’s invitation to share his life in a personal relationship.

★ We have focused on Messiah as “**the... gate,**” but he also calls himself “**the...road.**” He is not merely the Portal onto the way; he himself is the Way.

◆ Not only do we enter life *through* Jesus, we receive and experience life *in* Jesus. Relationship with him is not just the means to our goal of life; it is our life.

{1 P 5:10; Gal 3:27; Eph 2:10; Ro 6:11; I Th 4:16} According to the apostles “**We are called...in Christ,**” “**baptized into Christ,**” “**created**” anew “**in Christ,**” and made “**alive to God in Christ.**”

{Jn 15:4-5} The Son of God puts it this way: “**I am the vine; you are the branches.**” “**Remain in me, as I also remain in you.**”

◆ Participation in the Lord is everything. It gives us our identity and leads us to action. It determines who we are and, consequently, what we do.

{Jn 1:12; Ro 8:14} As for our identity in Christ, “**To all who... receive him....he [gives] the right to become children of God.**” “**Those who are led by the Spirit of God are,**” in fact, “**the children of God.**”

{II Co 5:17; Ro 8:29; Eph 4:22-24} ‘**Child of God**’ is not only a formal status, it is our substantial nature. “**If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come,**” “**For God... predestined**” us “**to be conformed to the image of his Son.**” We are called “**to put off [our] old self...and put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.**”

As for our action, it is governed by our identity. In the end, we do what we do because of who we are.

The “who we are” aspect clarifies why my religiosity was a shortcut to death. I did it all *for* God, but not *in* Jesus. I mimicked the words and behaviors of God’s children, but I wasn’t one myself.

The “what we do” aspect of this clarifies why any Christianity that is strictly confessional (that promises salvation if only one prays the Sinner’s Prayer and holds to true belief) is also “**a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death**”

{Ro 10:9} To be sure, “**If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**”

{Jn 12 2:13, 17, 20} Nevertheless, “**What good is it... if people claim to have faith but have no deeds? Can such faith save them?**” “**Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead**” and “**useless.**”

{Eph 2:8-10} For although “**it is by grace [we] are saved, through faith**” and “**not by works,**” still “**we are ...created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**”

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We are still in the Sermon on the Mount.

Some Christians read it as Law taken to the extreme. In this scenario, the Lord’s intent was to

expose our complete inability to keep the Law and our utter need for his mercy.

Some see it as a personal moral ideal. If they are right, the Lord's intent was to describe how an individual Christian should want to live out his or her life in private.

Some take it as a code for elite Christians. If that is the case, the Lord's intent is to give practical guidance specifically – and only – to hyper-committed, super saints.

✠ {Lohse} I cannot be dogmatic, but I contend that Matthew 5-7 is a self-portrait of Jesus. If you want to know what he is like, read the Sermon on the Mount. This **“word is not separable from the one who speaks it.”**

✠ Matthew 5-7 is also an invitation to share in his life. It is about thinking, speaking, and acting like Jesus, as we become more like Jesus, as we live in relation to Jesus.

This is beyond me. It is not beyond Christ in me.

This is beyond you. It is not beyond Christ in you.

This is beyond us. It is not beyond Christ in us.

Jesus is **“the gate”** and **“the way.”** Let us have life *through* him and *in* him. Every other road **“leads to destruction.”**

Matthew 7:13-14 is the Word of the Lord.